

Testimony in Support of

HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status

HB 6586: An Act Concerning Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

HB 6629: An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance.

Joint Committee on Human Services
February 14, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Lesser and Representative Gilchrest, Ranking Members Senator Seminara and Representative Case, and distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Nick Teeling, and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children (CT Voices), a research-based advocacy organization working to ensure that Connecticut is a thriving and equitable state where all children achieve their full potential.

Connecticut Voices for Children is testifying in support of **HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status**, **HB 6586: An Act Concerning Supplemental Nutrition Assistance**, and **HB 6629: An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance**.

HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of Husky Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status will expand access to the HUSKY program for immigrant residents in Connecticut up to the age of 26, and CT Voices applauds the committee for proposing legislation that takes another step forward in ensuring children and young people who call Connecticut their home have access to healthcare. Connecticut has helped its immigrant community in the last two years by expanding access to HUSKY to children ages 0-12 years because policymakers know that ensuring access to healthcare is not only morally right; it is sound fiscal policy. The committee can strengthen this legislation by expanding HUSKY to all immigrants irrespective of age.

If we want a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving, and growing workforce ready to meet our future needs, Connecticut must ensure that all residents have access to health care and coverage. Connecticut's most marginalized and disenfranchised communities, particularly low-income families and people of color, are more likely to be exposed to adverse social determinants of health—such as food insecurity, limited access to transportation, and housing instability;¹ included among these individuals are immigrant residents. Research tells us that a lack of access to health coverage and inequities in health care leads to poor health outcomes.²

Coverage gaps raise healthcare costs for both hospitals and the community from delayed patient care seeking, which also can cause worse patient outcomes. This makes managing their chronic health conditions and accessing preventive care difficult. Because they are largely excluded from Connecticut's health insurance system, immigrant families are in a particularly unique position of vulnerability. Individuals may delay seeking care until their condition requires emergency department visits or hospitalizations. Early treatment effectively reduces the amount an individual will pay for healthcare in the long term by preventing health issues from developing further and worsening. Lack of access to healthcare means that chronic health issues, such as diabetes and heart disease, that could be easily managed or treated, develop into more serious conditions that require more medical interventions and become more expensive in the long run.

Immigrants make incredible contributions to our state and disproportionately serve in the riskiest jobs, but are consistently punished and denied access to human rights such as basic health care because of their legal status. Immigrants in our state pay roughly \$145 million into state and local taxes every year, \$253 million into federal taxes, out of that \$54.6 million goes into medicare, and \$207.4 million goes into social security.³ Immigrant taxpayers help fund programs, such as HUSKY health; therefore, they should have coverage. They're also valuable members of our communities that have shouldered a public health crisis with virtually no state support.⁴ Most of all, all residents, irrespective of immigration status, deserve high-quality healthcare without worrying about a lack of insurance coverage. HB 6616 will save lives, reduce healthcare costs, and lead to better health outcomes for the state's residents.

Connecticut Voices for Children also supports HB 6586: An Act Concerning Supplemental Nutrition Assistance and HB 6629: An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance. HB 6586 would provide needed adjustments for grandparents raising children that recently saw small increases in Social Security benefits to prevent them from losing eligibility. Increasing the benefit in this way would allow more families to qualify, which in turn allows these families a more stable opportunity to plan for expenses and create sustainable household budgets. HB 6629 provides needed security for families, especially families who experienced the sudden shock of losing a job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowing families more time to get back on their feet will set them up for greater success in the future and create a stable foundation for their families to grow.

Connecticut Voices for Children urges the committee to pass HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status and work towards expanding access to all immigrants regardless of age, HB 6586: An Act Concerning Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, and HB 6629: An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nick Teeling
Local Strategies Deputy Director
Connecticut Voices for Children

1 “Healthy People 2020: Social Determinants of Health,” Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>.

2 Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Understanding and Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care. (2002). Unequal treatment: confronting racial and ethnic disparities in health care. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US)

3 4 The Contributions of New Americans in Connecticut.” New American Economy Research Fund,
n.d.<https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/the-contributions-of-new-americans-in-connecticut/>

4 (2020). Issue Briefing Book: 2020-2022. Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <https://ctvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Issue-Briefing-Book-2020-Final-Abridged-Version.pdf>.